

The City of Dearborn

Michael A. Guido
Mayor

David Norwood
Department of Building & Safety

Testimony before the Committee on Local Government and Urban Policy
Regarding House Bill No. 4377

Members of the Committee on Local Government and Urban Policy:

My name is David Norwood and I am the Director of the City of Dearborn Department of Building & Safety. It is the responsibility of this department to inspect non-owner occupied property within our city limits. The inspections include single family and multi-family properties. Single family and two family properties are inspected every three years. Three family and greater structures are inspected on an annual basis.

The legislation being proposed will cause significant problems for the citizens of Dearborn. While we are sensitive to overbearing government bureaucracy and excessive regulation, our non-owner occupied inspection program has been very successful in maintaining the integrity of our neighborhoods. We should be perfectly clear about one concept before going forward with any legislation

impacting rental property inspections- owning rental property is a business with profit as the ultimate motivation of a landlord. The tenants of these structures have very limited control of the structural maintenance of the dwelling. Thus, I believe everyone here would agree that inspections for the safety of the tenants and their visitors is paramount and clearly a role the government should perform on a regular and frequent basis.

I will outline several concerns with the legislation.

First, in recent years the City of Dearborn has seen an increase in the number of complaints from tenants and neighbors of non-owner occupied properties. In fact our Field Inspection staff that are assigned to monitor property maintenance in Dearborn's neighborhoods find that 50% of complaints that they respond to are at non-owner occupied dwellings, although non-owner occupied dwellings compromise only 25% of our housing stock.

Therefore, inspections of rental property are a critical component of maintaining our neighborhoods. By limiting inspections to every three years or subject to a written complaint, the bill will negatively impact property values due to blight and neglect of these properties.

Secondly, complainants have been forthcoming to our staff once anonymity has been granted. This legislation requires a written complaint which would be made available to the landlord. It is our position that if this bill is enacted, then we will not receive complaints due to fear of retribution. Furthermore, once the city's elected officials receive complaints they react and take steps to resolve the problem. It is unreasonable to expect that every complaint will be received in writing.

Thirdly, the bill limits the fees to only an inspector's salary divided by the number of hours worked in a calendar year. But, no organization, whether private or public, would provide a service without capturing all costs associated with that service. Thus, we are supportive of only charging true costs which include the true overhead.

David Norwood
Director
City of Dearborn
Department of Building & Safety